

Redistricting Hearing Legislative Reapportionment Committee October 15, 2001

I am Frances Hunter Jones a Pensacola resident, and I am representing the League of Women Voters of Pensacola Bay Area. Thank you for hearing input from those of us who are affected by what you do. I know that you have heard from others in the LWV and know the positions which we hold on redistricting and reapportionment so I will mention some more local concerns tonight.

The importance of the issues you are dealing with cannot be overemphasized. The lines which you will draw mainly determine who can be elected to the seats in Congress and in the State Legislature. The citizens who exercise the right to vote then complete the process of deciding who will fill those seats.

Our area is like much of Florida as we are defined geographically by rivers and bays. This is only one of the many things with which you deal in your deliberations.

When I have worked at a precinct I find a regrettable number of voters who are confused and surprised to find in whose districts they reside and vote. Much of this ~~must~~ <sup>is</sup> be due to the meandering lines which define some districts. I will speak to the two districts in which I reside. The strangely configured Senate district 7 follows the waterfront along the Gulf and bays beginning at the Alabama line about 15 miles west of here. It then continues along the coast to the Gulf County line almost 150 miles east, though it is only a few miles wide in most areas. This makes for great confusion in a number of counties with constituents too far apart to have meaningful interaction on issues or to cast meaningful votes at election time. In addition it must be very difficult to campaign in such a far-flung district with people of so many counties and municipalities.

*A preferable configuration for Esc. & Santa Rosa counties would be to draw lines vertically, as county lines occur.*

Another strange shape is House District 2, which is rather horse-shoe shaped, surrounding District 3. It begins at East Pensacola Heights on Pensacola Bay, continues north along Escambia Bay, then turns west among suburbs and outlying areas, then south along Perdido River and Perdido Bay (bordering Alabama), before ending at Star Lake and Bayshore Drive on Pensacola Bay again.

Surely in adjusting lines to fit the new realities of our population patterns, and keeping Voting Rights Act compliance, these districts can become more compact and more easily identifiable by our citizens.

In the wake of last Fall's election problems which adversely impacted Florida we are now seeing a re-awakening of interest in government as result of the tragic events of recent weeks. A fair and open redistricting process, drawing districts which are responsive to citizens' concerns, can be an important step in restoring confidence in the electoral process. It is hoped that there can be ~~more~~ <sup>later</sup> hearings around the state after you present some plans for our consideration.

*reputation*

Thank you very much for attention to our concerns.

STATEMENT FOR  
THE FLORIDA LEGISLATIVE REDISTRICTING PUBLIC HEARING  
City: PENSACOLA, FLORIDA  
Date: 10-15-01

<sup>EVENING</sup>  
Good afternoon, my name is JOHNNY BLACKMON. I serve as Chairperson of the Political Action Committee or ~~President~~ of the PENSACOLA Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Branches. First, Let me thank the Committee for the opportunity to make this brief statement for the record of this hearing. The Florida State Conference will make a full statement to this body prior to the conclusion of these hearings in October.

There are a number of things that concern us about the redistricting process. The most important element at this point is the nature of the standards that the Florida Legislature will use in drawing legislative and congressional districts. The standards you establish will impact this state and its constituencies for the next ten years. These standards will determine whether this state adheres to the concept of one person - one vote and they will certainly determine whether all of the voters of this state have an equal opportunity to elect candidates of their choice to the state house, the state senate and to the United States Congress.

It is equally important to the NAACP that you develop a process that respects the principle of "no regression". The past two redistricting sessions created a number of opportunities that allowed various communities to be able to elect candidates of their choice for the first time in the modern history of the state. We believe that those opportunities must be protected and enhanced. The NAACP believes that the redistricting process must preserve the concept of minority representation.

The redistricting process that you will under take will drastically reshape the political map of this state. The growth in population and the accompanying need to increase the population of legislative districts is significant. A brief review of the current maps show that most of the districts currently considered to be majority minority districts are currently under-populated. It is important that care be taken to insure the character of these districts and to insure that communities with common interest be kept together. The people who will be served by these districts must influence the determination of common interests.

It is also important as you provide these public opportunities for input into the way the process will be carried out, that you provide an equal opportunity for input in the actual process of drawing districts. There are any number of groups that will seek to influence this activity. It is very important that you provide every opportunity through as many avenues as possible to allow all interested parties to actually participate in crafting the districts, which will serve them during the next ten years.

The NAACP looks forward to working with the members of this committee and your staff persons during the next few months on behalf of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. It is important that when this process is complete that the constituencies are convinced that there is power in their vote. This means that they must be clearly able to influence the election of those people who will make public policy in their communities. This means that the standards that you apply to this process as well as the process itself must be true to our democratic principles. Thank you for this opportunity.

Name: JOHNNY BLACKMON  
Address: 2017 N. 7<sup>TH</sup> AVENUE  
Tel. #: 438-4882  
Fax #: 850 438-0254

My name is Stanley S. Berg and I reside at 59 Poquito Road in Shalimar, Florida, in an unincorporated area of Okaloosa County. I want to take this opportunity to express my strong feeling that all districts established by the Legislature should be compact and composed of contiguous areas and, if at all possible, should not divide counties.

Almost every article I read forecasts that districts will be drawn with an eye to favoring the majority party and its incumbents. I hope this will not be the case. Clearly, districts should be drawn objectively, and not with an eye to favoring or harming any incumbent, political party, group, or individual.

In Okaloosa County we now have three representatives in the Florida House of Representatives. One of them represents, I believe, only five precincts and part of another, all of them in a small corner of the county. Further, it's not clear to county residents what logic was applied in splitting the county between the other two representatives. The arrangement of Florida Senate boundaries is puzzling, too. I urge you to include more openness in the redistricting process this time so that citizens can have greater input and can understand it better. I feel certain that this would contribute to greater confidence in the process and that's sorely needed.

Thank you.